



PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

Program #5210

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WELCOME

Lillian Daniel: Welcome to “30 Good Minutes!” We’re happy you’ve joined us for this half-hour of reflection on faith. I’m Lillian Daniel.

Lydia Talbot: And I’m Lydia Talbot. Our guest today is Dr. Benjamin Reaves, Vice President of Mission and Ministries for the Adventist Health System in Orlando, Florida. He’s going to talk about what to do when temptation comes our way.

Lillian Daniel: We also welcome back Michael Siegel, Senior Rabbi of Anshe Emet Synagogue in Chicago. He has some thoughts for us about exercising self-control.

Lydia Talbot: And we start with the story of an accomplished Christian writer and editor whose spiritual journey led him away from the worship style of his youth, to the ancient liturgical practices of his Episcopal church in Glen Ellyn. This is Rodney Clapp’s spiritual journey.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Rodney Clapp: Well, I am Rodney Clapp. I’m a writer and an editor. I grew up country church United Methodist in rural Oklahoma. We didn’t have tent revivals but at least twice a year we had revivalists and they would preach revivalist. When I was in high school something happened at your church that was called the “Lay Witness Mission.” They talked a lot about what does it mean to be a Christian, not just on Sunday, not just once a week, but Monday through Saturday, as well. And that was a kind of a real turning point for me in my spiritual life.

I had known since junior high that I wanted to write. I loved movies and I thought I wanted to be film critic. But I went to Oklahoma State University and, of course, I was only there a few weeks or days before I realized you don’t become a movie critic by studying at Oklahoma State University. There is no film school, or at least there wasn’t in the mid-70s when I was there. At the same time I had had this real up-rise, upsurge in the importance of my faith so I began to look in a little bit different direction. I began to think maybe I should go into some sort of Christian or theological publishing. And, sure enough, made the move to Wheaton College graduate school. It was during that time at Wheaton I studied with Robert Webber, who was an evangelical theologian and a man who really understood the richness and the breadth of the church.

I was drawn to liturgical worship. I was drawn to the sacraments in particular. And so what I would now call a eucharistically centered spirituality became profoundly important to me and an essential part of my faith life, and literally the part that gives nutrition, vitality to my faith. Off

and on over the years I've struggled with depression and some obsessive issues and so forth. So there have been many times when I have come to church, when I have come to the altar and knelt to receive the Eucharist when I didn't feel anything except numbness. And yet the Eucharist is an action where the priest—the celebrant—and the people gather together, and God, Jesus Christ—the resurrected Christ—is coming into that and is really present.

We live in this really busy culture. We live in this frenetic culture. I've long had this sense that there's an emptiness and a desperation at the heart of our spectacle oriented, consumer culture and wanted to struggle with how as Christians do we respond to that without simply falling totally into it. I think that the Eucharist, it's just a very sensual thing of chewing the bread and swallowing the wine with its mild sting and taking that down and just being totally involved in it bodily. It's extremely rich to me and the Eucharist is something that's so rich it can contain all of those states of mind and possibilities.

SPEAKER INTRODUCTION

Lillian Daniel: Rodney Clapp is a former editor for Christianity Today and has just written a new book about Johnny Cash. For more information you can visit our web site at 30goodminutes.org.

Now, let me tell you about our speaker. Dr. Benjamin Reaves is a minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and has appeared every year on "30 Good Minutes" since 1989. He's the former President of Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama, and now serves as Vice President of Mission and Ministries for Adventist Health System in Orlando, Florida. We're very happy to welcome Benjamin Reaves back to "30 Good Minutes." Welcome, Ben.

MESSAGE

Benjamin Reaves: Thank you.

It was a drawing portraying a worn, weary, burdened Jesus out in the barren desert; weak with hunger, mercilessly tempted by the enemy of souls. The Biblical account, found in Luke chapter 4, brings to life the intensity of the no holds barred struggle. We, of course, identify and resonate in our humanity to the areas of temptation, and as if we were watching a Gospel thriller we cheer every move and brave response of the battered but unyielding hero.

With joy, we celebrate the victory of the Master and the fact the devil stepped up to the plate three times and, in the language of baseball, struck out! As I left the scriptural narrative with a sharpened sensitivity to the devices and deceits of the enemy, as well as the secret of successful overcoming by the word, I did so not quite alert to the ominous import of the sentence that follows hard on the heels of the magnificent overcoming. In the 13th verse of Luke 4: "Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time," or, departed with a resolution to attack him again.

It's as if the enemy leaves muttering, "Regardless of what happened this time, it's not over. This is not the end of it. The battle is still on!" That phrase, "a more opportune time," and its disturbing truth began to consume my mind. An opportune time for the enemy is a vulnerable time for us, a time when situation and circumstance enhance the likelihood of his success.

And as David Jeremias reminds us, “Why is it opportunity knocks once but it seems like temptation is at my door every day?”

The thought dominated my mind. When is that “more convenient time?” I need to know. Is it when I’m tired, idle, bored, weakened, despondent? From the perspective I had in my youthful days, surely that convenient time for him is when we have failed or been defeated. The time when everything has gone wrong, everything going downhill, you just ahead of the avalanche, the time when you are on the bottom and the best you can do is barely look up.

Like an embarrassed, humiliated Peter. Dejected, disgusted, lost in his discouragement and defeat. A professional fisherman who toiled all night, and caught nothing.

Or like me, early in my ministry in Terre Haute, Indiana. After a disastrous sermon, my ego battered by wave after wave of painful doubts that were almost drowning my conviction of call. As I relive it, certainly that can be the enemy's opportune time.

But as I got a little older, and hopefully wiser, I came to recognize, as I'm sure you know, that more convenient time for the enemy rather than a time of defeat can be a time of triumph: when your efforts have succeeded beyond your expectations; when you are at the top of your game; when perceptive people with appreciation for exceptional talent are singing your praises.

As they sang David's, the giant killer, who learned the hard way, the giants keep coming. For if one comes to lose sight of his entire dependence on God and to trust to his own strength, he is sure to fall.

But then again, maybe an opportune time for the enemy could be when Moses was seemingly forgotten, forlorn and forsaken in the desert for 40 years. The truth is, the eroding ritual of the routine can be difficult and demanding. It's harder to live the Christian life little by little over the long haul, in the desert of the daily.

I think of Mother Teresa, ministering to those often left by others to die. I think of the press coverage on Mother Teresa's long dark night of the soul, as she wrote with weary familiarity of an arid landscape from which, seemingly, the Deity had disappeared.

Is that the more convenient time? Or is it the senior years, when the reality of age rudely intrudes into your personal fantasyland? When the temporary exuberance of youth has surrendered to the inexorable advance of old age with its cynicism, if not possible disillusionment? When the fumes of yesterday's zeal and vision may be all that is left in an empty spiritual tank?

As I sort through all that, I arrive at the inescapable conclusion, to know that opportune time might be helpful, but what you and I really need to know, beyond the shadow of a doubt, is not the “when.” The focus of our attention ought to be, whenever the enemy's opportune time—despondency, sickness, failure, waning stages of life, whenever—the victorious Savior is there.

There, as with Peter in his failure. “Launch out into the deep and try it again.” There, as with a fallen David who, awed by God’s mercy and forgiveness, wrote in Psalm 32, “Happy is the person whose sins are forgiven, whose wrongs are pardoned.” There, as with Moses, when the Divine disrupted the desert of the daily, inviting him to a Holy Ground experience.

The victorious Savior is there, as with you and me, in the words of Carol Cymbala:

“When my strength was all gone,
When my heart had no song,
Still in love he’s proved faithful to me.
When my heart looked away,
The many times I could not pray,
Still my God was faithful to me.
Every word he’s promised is true,
What I thought was impossible,
I’ve seen my God do.

He’s been faithful, faithful to me.
Looking back his love and mercy I see,
Though in my heart I have questioned,
And failed to believe,
He’s been faithful, faithful to me.”

CONVERSATION

Lydia Talbot: If you’d like a printed transcript, audio copy or DVD of the message you just heard from Benjamin Reaves, we’ll tell you how to place an order at the end of the program. Or you can visit our website at 30goodminutes.org to watch the video or read the text anytime.

Now, let’s talk with Ben Reaves. Benjamin Reaves, what a joy to have you back today! A year ago when you were with us, you were suffering from paralysis of the left vocal cord.

Ben Reaves: That is correct.

Lydia Talbot: That can impact your heart. You have experienced the enemy knocking at your door everyday, as you say.

Ben Reaves: Yes.

Lydia Talbot: How has that beautiful spirit in the Gospel hymn you closed your message, by Carol Cymbala—that God is faithful to you and to all of us—sustained you in your darkest moments of fear?

Ben Reaves: It’s been everything. It’s been the rock floor, the foundation that does not move, does not shake. It’s the arms that embrace me and comfort me during those nights and times of sleeplessness, when you wonder if sleep will come and you wonder what tomorrow will bring. It’s that kind of love and the assurance he’s been and he will be faithful.

Lydia Talbot: The hymn is really an assurance, isn't it?

Ben Reaves: Oh, absolutely.

Lillian Daniel: I was curious, a lot of times in our society we think of temptation as being rooted in the thing that is tempting us, like I'm tempted to eat that chocolate cake. But you referred consistently to the enemy tempting us. Could you say a little bit more about who the enemy is and what you mean by that?

Ben Reaves: Absolutely. I believe that there are forces for good and forces for evil. I believe the enemy, sometimes referred to as Satan or the Devil, represents that force for evil and represents a committed intent to destroy. The temptation is always to destroy. God may test us in order to prove or reveal, but God does not tempt us to destroy us. The enemy does. I believe that.

Lydia Talbot: Ben, you touched on personal enemies: sickness, despondency, fear, waning stages of life. What about the social justice kinds of enemies against the notion of distributive justice and peace making in our culture? What about those kinds of enemies?

Ben Reaves: Those enemies are very real and, I believe, those enemies find strength and support from the enemy that I referenced. And I believe it is our job, our duty, our privilege, our opportunity to, by God's grace and his strength, to engage those enemies. We carry a burden of responsibility that we need to meet.

Lillian Daniel: I want to take you back to the story you told about being a young minister in Terre Haute and giving what you thought was a terrible sermon and how the enemy was tempting you then. I wondered, what were you tempted by? What was happening in that moment?

Ben Reaves: I think what was happening at that moment was a reality check. I had not been that long out of seminary. In seminary I was very successful. I got the only A in the homiletics class and I had a sense of assurance that was ill founded. And I think there were a couple of things going there. I think God used that opportunity to help bring me to my sense of reality. But I think the enemy also saw an opportunity to maybe shake me loose from the conviction that God had called me.

Lydia Talbot: Now you were just in your twenties then, isn't that right? You were a young man

Ben Reaves: Yes. A young man, gonna change the world, turn everything upside down! All people needed was to hear me!

Lydia Talbot: And you saw that sermon as a failure. Why really? I mean, was it really a defeat?

Ben Reaves: It was not a defeat. It was a failure because of the so-called standard that I had set up for myself and the misunderstanding of what a sermon is. A sermon is not proof of my ability

to do this or that, it is the word of God being shared by a traveler with other travelers. But I didn't know that then!

Lydia Talbot: You also say that the enemy, temptation, knocks on our door in moments of triumph. What have been those moments for you personally?

Ben Reaves: When you begin to believe your press clippings you get beside yourself. I can remember at Andrews University when I was campus pastor for college youth, a little note someone sent me after a sermon. The note said: "Your reputation for excellence is well deserved." I'm ashamed to admit how much I enjoyed that note! And that note did not serve me well because I was still trying to get my head around this is God's business, this is not about you, Reaves!

Lillian Daniel: Ben, I'm interested in the work you currently do in the health care field and how your ministry has taken you in that direction. I wondered if you could talk a little bit about what are some of the temptations that get us into real trouble with our physical health as well as our spiritual health?

Ben Reaves: Well, with our physical health some of the temptations may be chocolate and a few other various and sundry things. But also not being willing to set boundaries for ourselves, feeling as if somehow we are indispensable, we are the only one who can do things, we're the only ones who can travel here and take care of that. In all of those things can wear and impact our health, but as far as Adventist Health System is concerned, part of my responsibility is enhancing, lifting up the priority and reviewing mission and the fulfillment of mission in, as we say, following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

Lydia Talbot: Ben, in our closing moment, I get back to that wonderful hymn that God is faithful to us. We usually think of being faithful to God. What do you say for the non-believer or those who lose their faith? They say they've lost their faith when something very bad happens. What kind of assurance can you give to that kind of thinking?

Ben Reaves: I can give the assurance of my personal experience that as they have experienced loss, I have experienced loss. But then I can also share with them what has been a comfort to me without suggesting that this may necessarily be received by them. But as someone who has experienced loss, this is what carried me through.

Lydia Talbot: Thank you, Ben.

REFLECTION INTRODUCTION

Lydia Talbot: And now we turn to another in our series on the "Fruits of the Spirit." Today we welcome back our friend, Michael Siegel, Senior Rabbi of Anshe Emet Synagogue in Chicago, with some thoughts on self-control.

REFLECTION

Michael Siegel: One of the great Hasidic masters, Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sasov, once taught his disciples this lesson: "Here are some qualities that with the proper self discipline will make for

good character. Remove anger from your heart; find peace of mind, for when you have no peace, you have nothing; reprove no one until you yourself are perfect; remember that the souls of others are just as much of the Godhead as your soul is; and keep in mind that only one who has withstood temptation can be called righteous.” Rather than looking to others to follow the words of the Rabbi, imagine yourself practicing the type of self control that would make you less prone to anger and judgment, while at the same time being more peaceful and accepting of others. Imagine seeing the world through God’s eyes and not simply your own.

CLOSING

Lydia Talbot: Thank you, Michael, and our thanks again to Benjamin Reaves, Rodney Clapp, and you for being with us today on “30 Good Minutes.” I’m Lydia Talbot.

Lillian Daniel: And I’m Lillian Daniel. As we go, I encourage you to visit our website at 30GoodMinutes.org for more information about today’s program and an extensive collection of other messages, reflections, and stories to deepen your faith. Now, from all of us at “30 Good Minutes,” may peace be with you in the week ahead.